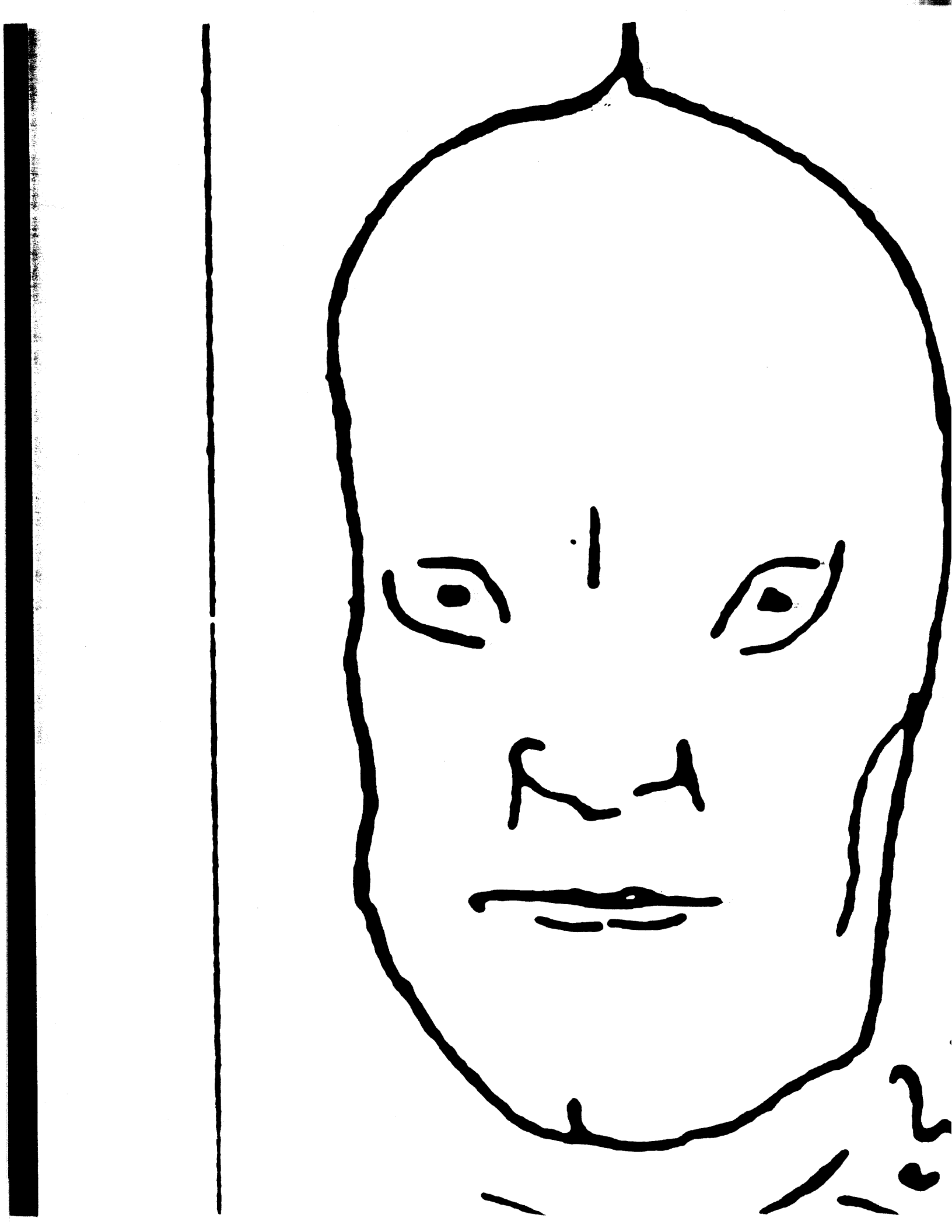

Wambly Bald

WAMBLY BALD

ON·THE LEFT·BANK 1929-1933

EDITED BY

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN V

OHIO UNIVERSITY PRESS

ATHENS, OHIO LONDON

Copy for Pandora Lee Cory The Library University of California at Berkeley

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53826966

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Bald, Wambly.
On the Left Bank, 1929-1933.

Bibliography: p.
Includes index.
1. Paris (France)—Intellectual life—20th century. 2. Left Bank (Paris, France)—Intellectual life. 3. Americans—France—Paris—Biography. 4. Bohemianism—France—Paris—History—20th century. I. Franklin, Benjamin, 1939- . II. Title.
DC715.B22 1987 944'.3610815 86-23638
ISBN 0-8214-0852-6

DC715
B221
1987
MAIN

to the memory of Benjamin Franklin IV

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O. To breathe of the wind that is blowing
And quit this living in preserved air.
A plate of beans means more
To my stomach
Than all memories or hopes.[1]

* * *

1. Bald refers to *New-Paris-York*, 2 (September 1930). Raymond Duncan writes about Ellis Island in "Paris possède son Ellis Island," p. 1; his poem, "Take a Breath," is on p. 17.

Wednesday, 8 October 1930, p. 4.

We get wind of a monthly—*The New Review*—to be published in Montparnasse. The first number will appear promptly on January 1, 1931.

Contributors will be leading creative writers and unknowns. Here is your chance. Ideas which lead to creation are wanted. The publication proposes to be critical in the larger, philosophical sense, although all the important books of the Continent will be reviewed each month.

Current literature is running a hellish race. Different trends diverge, converge and hate each other. Trends are as panicky as people or horses. That is because guidance comes from the rear. But panics are far more stimulating than bleached ideas or aspirin tablets. *The New Review* promises to remind its readers of the monthly panic in the literary world.

The New Review will be published by Samuel Putnam, who has secured American capital for the founding of an "International journal of creative thought." Putnam is the scholar whose American version of Rabelais created so much discussion last year and whose translation of Kiki's *Memoirs* bothered the American Customs this year. He has just completed an anthology of contemporary European writers.[1]

Putnam is young and generous. There will be no hand-woven lace fringing his magazine, nor will he sprawl heavily over half the pages. The material should interest the low brow as well as the high brow, for both have their place as have the male and the female. Fusion of virility and subtlety.

Terrace discussions of the forthcoming periodical reveal an active interest

in a dependable monthly. Some have been assured that it will not be a "gentlewomanly miscellany of the Victorian era." An active organ like *The New Review* should supply a definite need.

* * *

Aleister Crowley sends a card which opens with: "Yes, indeed, but whither?" It concludes with the information: "I have something better than ideas."

To really know Crowley, read his *Diary of a Drug Fiend*.[2] He knew all the combinations and was referred to as "666."

He used to parade around here with his head shaved save for the waxed forelock which Montparnassians called the "Mark of Buddha," and which he described as his "Cling-Clong." The stodgy man of 50 was frequently seen in kilties or plus fours.

He was said to have practiced black magic and addressed the devil by his first name. He boasted of his skill in sorcery, alchemy and hypnotism. Orgies were commonplace to him; he liked to create new fashions.

Oddly enough, some people believed in Crowley. They were fascinated by his flights of fancy. His bedroom, for instance, was surrounded by mirrors and this egotist could watch himself from seven angles while lying in bed.

Few people knew the source of his income, but some insisted that he received annually 300,000 francs from an estate in Scotland. His memoirs, brought out six months ago by the Manchester Press, are selling for ten dollars a copy.[3]

Crowley had some talent as a painter. One of his best works was *Three Men Carrying a Black Goat across the Snow to Nowhere*, which also proves that he was a poet.

The French Government didn't like Crowley, and so they dismissed him about a year ago. He had plenty of color, but it was a bit too garish.

* * *

1. Samuel Putnam, *François Rabelais* (London & Toronto: Cape, 1929; New York: Cape & Smith, 1929); François Rabelais, *All the Extant Works*, translated by Putnam (New York: Covici Friede, 1929). See p. 15, n. 1.
2. Aleister Crowley, *Diary of a Drug Fiend* (London: Collins, 1922; New York: Dutton, 1923).
3. Crowley, *The Spirit of Solitude* (London: Mandrake, 1929).

talks in connection with *The European Caravan* which he edited and his biography of Marguerite of Navarre.

Putnam has just finished translating 12 short stories by Pirandello. The volume will probably be called *Horse in the Moon.* (The recent sweepstakes may have had something to do with that title.) Pirandello is also responsible for *As You Desire Me,* a play running at the Elliot Theatre, of which Putnam is making a literary adaptation.[1]

This Putnam is a busy man. In conjunction with Richard Thoma, one of the associate editors of *The New Review,* he is working on the libretto for George Antheil's next opera, based on *Les Enfants Terribles,* translated last year by the same phenomenon.[2]

Then he sends a weekly letter to the New York *Sun,* wherein he describes the Paris literary fashions.[3] Incidentally, the Gotham Book Mart of New York will be the American distributors of *The New Review.*

Six feet two he stands, a silent—oh hell, we have a photograph of him which we promised not to use. But we will. Sure we will.

George Seldes writes from America that he hopes to be married without further delay. George recently wrote an article on Mussolini for *Scribner's.* Is there a connection? He also wrote a big book with the word "terror" in the title.[4]

* * *

Isadora Duncan had the spirit, if not the brains, of Plato. (Let's not quarrel about that.) The language of the dance had provided a tentative form easily rationalized but the form supplied little more than a glimpse of that spirit. Nor did the penny biographers bring us closer to Isadora after she was gone.

An old Parnassian offers a commemorative exposition of Isadora Duncan at the Galerie E. Brummer—the vernissage tomorrow. For an appreciable period, Abraham Walkowitz followed the dancer through the mazes of her emotional life, until he could anticipate her gestures, her confidences, her hysterias. The two were cronies when Isadora occupied an apartment now painted red by a giant vertical sign of a jazz palace in the Rue Delambre.

In those days Isadora, Bob Chanler, Aleister Crowley and Walkowitz used to snap their fingers in unison. That was music. At the exhibit commencing tomorrow, Walkowitz will show crayon sketches, watercolors and paintings, which should bring back to most of us an ancient epoch.

Kiki is the Queen of Montparnasse. She was elected by her friends a few years ago at a blowout at the Bobino. Kiki has been a model, café singer and movie actress. You may hear her sing any night at the Oceanic Bar in the Edgar Quinet district.

Broca was one of the cleverest caricaturists in the Quarter. He comes from that region of France commonly referred to as *Midi moins le quart,* which may have accounted for the volubility of his speech. Broca was brilliant.

Kiki is still popular after her fashion, despite the usual battle with heft. She still is the life of the party. For many years the two were excellent friends.

Neither of them has missed anything, but Kiki had less imagination and more vitality. Kiki is still Kiki, but Broca has collapsed and is obliged to rest in a local sanatorium.

*

1. See p. 33, n. 1, and p. 43, n. 1. Samuel Putnam, *Marguerite of Navarre* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1935; London: Jarrolds, 1936).
2. George Antheil did not base an opera on *Les Enfants terribles.* See p. 21, n. 8.
3. The *New York Sun* began publishing Samuel Putnam's letters in 1929.
4. George Seldes, "Twilight of the Dictators," *Scribner's,* 89.5 (May 1931), pp. 465–76. See p. 28, n. 3.

Tuesday, 7 April 1931, p. 4.

Ezra Pound comes to town next Thursday. The strong man of Rapallo will go into a huddle with Samuel Putnam, editor of *The New Review.* The next number will be out in eight days. Feathers will fly.

George Reavey, one of our Irish poets, is editing the English edition of *Formes.* He is also writing a series of *Faust* poems.[1] Reavey is Cambridge, mild and quiet. Let us call attention to his red chin weeds. They cover a good story. Caught in the Russian Revolution, the poet was tapped on the chin with a brick, which left a tiny scar. The beard covers it.

Another Irish poet now among us is Samuel Beckett, instructor at the University of Dublin. His book on Proust has just been published in London.[2]

evening he met another friend, Joe Chock. Joe has just broken into Broadway with a burlesque on heaven. It's a radio play. The hero goes around through five acts with a microphone concealed in his *caleçons*. Miller likes friend Joe because the latter drinks champagne and smokes Coronas. Miller showed me a few of the butts he had collected. Succulent snipes. He smokes only the best butts when he is with Joe.

"Then what?" I asked in a loud voice because Miller was falling asleep on his feet. He hadn't slept for two nights.

"I don't have to worry about a job. In Montparnasse no one has to work. The next day I met another friend of mine. You know, Ludwig Truss, the butter and egg producer. At four in the morning, after a long discussion about life and travel, he took me for a long drive in his Suiza to Fontainebleau. The mist was rising from the lake and the ducks were very white. We sat on a terrace overlooking the palace of François Ier. Then we argued about how many horses one could drive abreast up the crazy stairs of the palace. But we both got bored and began to drive back to Paris. We had a big breakfast at the Dôme."

"What a wonderful life!" I said.

"That's how it is," said Miller. "Other friends came up. They look high and low for me. There's Osman the banker, who always treats me to sparkling Mousseux. I shake hands with people all day long. Even Link Gillespie once bought me a drink. Montparnasse is a great place. Everyone likes to help a fellow who is broke. A couple of days ago, a girl I hardly knew stopped me on the street. I told her about my status, so she took me home with her and sewed a couple of buttons on my coat and trousers. People are swell, do you see what I mean? They worry about you."

I am reporting our conversation very faithfully. Miller is not a son of badinage. He is a legitimate child of Montparnasse, the salt of the Quarter. He represents its classic color that has not faded since Murger and other optimists. A good word is *esprit*. I told him that. "You have *esprit*," I said, lighting his cigar butt. Then he said: "Can you give me an alarm clock?"

"What for?"

"Well, you see, Joe," (He always calls me Joe. He calls everybody Joe.) "I am having such a good time that I hate to miss any of it. I like to get up early to enjoy every available hour."

Suddenly Miller staggered and fell back against the wall of a building. "What's the matter?" I said. His voice was frail and I could read between the lines of his face.

"What you need is food," I said, reaching in my pocket. "I'm your friend, too. Get yourself some food," I said, and handed him a franc.

Montparnasse is that way.

* * *

Tuesday, 3 November 1931, p. 4.

The bored are occasionally treated to a rumor that Aleister Crowley is back in Montparnasse. Then there is a thrill and new conversation.

These rumors are false and the notorious sorcerer has just sent us a letter to prove it. A couple of years ago he was asked to get out of the country, and since then a dozen sensational legends have reached a suggestible public, all of them more or less plausible and decidedly nutritious.

Possibly the best story was his interesting "suicide" in Portugal about nine months ago. On one bank of a raging whirlpool called "The Mouth of Hell" was found the following note signed by our former neighbor: "Your mouth was hotter than this," addressed obviously to a woman. After that he was reported to be in Hollywood, in Moscow and in Cicero. One story had him lecturing at Cornell on ethics and eugenics.

At any rate, Montparnasse cannot forget this romantic figure who used to stroll to the Dôme or the Coupole in kilties or plus fours, his entire head cleanly shaved save for a single waxed forelock described by himself as "the Mark of Buddha." Sometimes he called it his "Cling-Clong," and he was in the habit of dyeing it pink or saffron to explain his mood.

The author of *The Diary of a Drug Fiend* boasted of his skill in hypnotism and alchemy, an accomplishment that never fails to impress certain types of neurotic American women who feel themselves unfulfilled and suddenly discover a craving for a new content before surrendering to the inevitability of patient desolation.[1]

Crowley was a cheerful individual who would say to all comers: "I am a practicing magician." At his studio parties he would turn on green lights, murmur a few incantations and then perform a series of feats that never failed to entertain. There was nothing like it anywhere else in Montparnasse. And there is the story of his eugenic colony in Sicily, where perfect children were being manufactured until Mussolini got tired of it and told him to go away. It seems that quality is seldom respected.

And yet the intelligent have always regarded Crowley as a man of creative imagination and genuine enthusiasm for a poetic revaluation of amuse-

ment. He is also a painter, and at present he is exhibiting his work in Berlin. He writes: "Let me know if you have anything on hand that might wish to sympathize with fallen grandeur." His best painting is called *Three Men Carrying a Black Goat Across the Snow to Nowhere*, an ambiguous title but a positive indication of a good poet.

Black magic in Montparnasse is still being fostered by Mme. Maria de Naglowska, a handsome Russian woman who furthers her cause by peddling her own newspaper, *La Flèche*, in front of the Rotonde.[2] One night a week her flock gathers in a large, bare room not far from the Closerie des Lilas, and mild experiments are made. Another modern struggle with 19th century romanticism.

I spoke of all this to Bill Seabrook, the explorer and author of *The Magic Island* and *Jungle Ways*.[3] Bill is at home in Africa or Toulon, but he never fails to visit his old spot in the Place de l'Odéon, an affinity of 15 years standing.

This son of a preacher studied philosophy at college, read his father's Bible and finally rushed to the wild jungles for explanations. He found plenty and his recital of savage rites and mores was so startling that I bit off the end of my cigarette and gulped it down.

"Bill," I said, "you're a cannibal."

"You bet."

"Did you really eat human flesh at one of the jungle parties?"

"Sure."

"Was the victim a man, woman or child?"

"I don't know. They gave me a slice of neck."

"Did it taste like pork?"

"Yes, except that it needed more seasoning."

"Ugh!"[4]

And so I said to Bill: "Come along with me and I'll show you something in our own alley."

Bill took off his goatskin bathrobe and African sandals. He dressed and shaved, and followed me out of the house. We walked past the Place St.

Michel and past the Sorbonne neighborhood. The streets were dark. Finally we came to a shack and I glued my mouth to a keyhole. "Désespéré," I whispered hoarsely.

Someone opened the door and we walked down a long courtyard. So we descended two flights of cement stairs and I knocked cautiously on a dirty window after repeating the password.

We were admitted after some minutes and saw two men playing billiards with human skulls. "These men," I told Bill later, "are members of the Désespérés Club, a very eclectic circle." Then we went to the Dôme. But what got me sore was that Bill wasn't even impressed.

* * *

1. See p. 33, n. 2.
2. *La Flèche. Organe d'action magique* was published in Paris from October 1930 until sometime in 1933.
3. William B. Seabrook, *The Magic Island* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1929; London: Harrap, 1929); *Jungle Ways* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1931; London: Harrap, 1931).
4. According to Marjorie Worthington, *The Strange World of Willie Seabrook* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966), pp. 54-55, Seabrook did not eat human flesh in Africa; instead, he ate the flesh of a man who had been killed in a traffic accident in Paris.

Tuesday, 24 November 1931, p. 4.

Society on this side of the river had a big time last Saturday night. It was quite an occasion.

The younger set was invited to a dance recital at the home of Princess Lieven, a gracious and charming hostess with a brilliant lineage and flair for conversation.[1] The event, so to speak, was superabundant with pulchritude; and history informs us, not without unction, that the smart galas of the pre-Queen Anne *siècle* lacked the flavor of our own modest Left Bank whoopee.

Last year the same dancer gave a show at the same place.[2] It was that way again last Saturday. Everyone had a swell time. She is a good dancer. Her name is Helba Huara and she comes from Peru. She has a husband. His name is Gonzalo More. He was there too. He played the piano. When Helba

umental in size and all of them betrayed a purpose, a method that indicated a rational program on the part of the artist.

Hiler had a theory.

He spoke of mathematical composition, the geometrical instinct, the scientific use of color. He said that before using color he carefully prepared a plan; then he executed it with the punctiliousness of a scientist.

Where is the line between art and science?

I sat back, smoking a *bleu*, and watched him work. He employs all the instruments of a mechanical drawing set: the ruler, the triangle, the compass, the stencil. Hiler works like an architect.

A few weeks after, I returned to his studio. Color had been applied so shrewdly on the canvas that the mechanical skeleton had taken on flesh. The problems of space had been met by color harmonies. I smoked another cigarette.

He was opposed to abstract painting because it ignored associative psychological elements; he was opposed to representational painting because it ignored physiological factors and because it was a recognized bore. He wouldn't compromise.

"A painting must satisfy man's geometrical instinct."

The reader may form his own opinion. Obviously, a discussion of the "geometrical instinct" has no place in this strip. The subject is presented at length and in its simplest terms because your correspondent considers it an American movement born in Montparnasse.

Within the last three years Neonaturism (as Hiler calls it) has spread over the coteries of French painters. French schools calling themselves "*neonaturalistes*" acknowledge the American preceptor. The term explains itself: the artist employs (disciplines) nature by selecting recognizable objects to fit a preconceived pattern. This pattern is shed by the subconscious but developed by the conscious, the latter deliberately using the recipes of modern art.

Reduced to a clause, Neonaturism is the submission of nature to the laws of abstract painting.

* * *

Nina Hamnett, once a belle of Montparnasse, retired to England and wrote a book about it. Her revelations, *Laughing Torso*, was [*sic*] another one of those flamingo biographies.[1]

She wrote something about Aleister Crowley. He didn't like it and is suing her. Aleister Crowley was shocked.

That brings back old memories. Crowley is author of *The Diary of a Drug Fiend*, and he knew all about alchemy.[2] The only vegetation on his shaved head was a saffron forelock, called "Cling-Clong." He went in for green lights and incantations. He gave grand rocking-parties, and he spoke of Black Magic and hypnotism as one speaks of the stock market—always with an air of uncertainty. He was a character of Montparnasse. He is the hero of many legends. Stories about him would fill a waste basket.

Crowley is also a lecturer in London. Last week he spoke at one of Foyle's literary luncheons at the Grosvenor House on the philosophy of magic (Magick).

He became famous a few years ago when he invented the Kubla Khan No. 2 cocktail. Now he is suing Nina.

Here is an extract from the book:

Nina visited Crowley's studio. He greeted her, walked away calmly and immediately fell asleep. "He was lying on the hearthrug in front of the fire asleep. He woke up, stared at me and said, 'Are you alone?' I said 'Yes,' and he lay down and went to sleep again."[3]

Perhaps Nina should sue Crowley.

Jimmie, the barman, is back from a long vacation at Gre-sur-Loire [*sic*]. He says that Eric and Peggy Scott would watch him spar with Marion Rites, an artist who will give a show here soon. Jimmie says everyone had a good time and romped about in knickers. The Duc de Cardon acted as referee.

* * *

1. See pp. 98-99, n. 2.
2. See p. 33, n. 2.
3. The quotation is from Nina Hamnett's *Laughing Torso*, p. 31.

Tuesday, 18 October 1932, p. 4.

One hundred years from now, professors will be lecturing on Montparnasse: its development and decay.

I feel safe in making that prediction because there is no fear of contradiction. There is something sublime about phrases like "The Decline of the

even months ago, Jimmie whispered in my ear: "Romance is romance, t it? Love is love, isn't it?"

efore replying, I studied him for half an hour. Then I said: "Always." I flattered by his confidence.

ove is like a trapeze. Jimmie sprang for it and is now swinging into rimony. It happened in Deauville last summer. She is French.

mmie smiles bashfully as his friends shake his hands. But he is not afraid, after he was warned that on wedding nights tragedy is born. May there ew patterns ever![1]

ast week, I said: "What are you doing to prepare yourself?"

e replied: "I am keeping in perfect shape. Every day, I skip the rope, do low boxing and take long runs through the Bois de Boulogne." The mpanying photo shows Jimmie in a training moment.

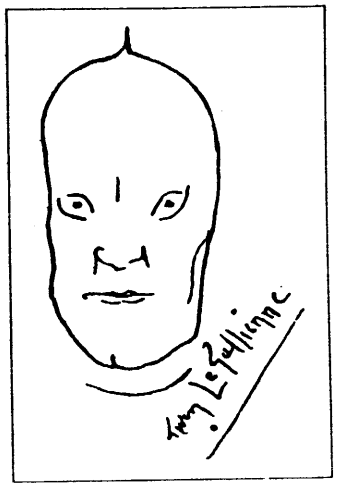
mmie is the hero of half a dozen novels. Caricatures of him in all poses moods have been circulated in a hundred papers of America. Photo- hs of this figure decorate the walls of numerous popular bars on both of the Seine. Novelists have dubbed him the most "natural" barman in . He is probably the most popular individual in Montparnasse. Why? I t know. I only call your attention to the weekly load of mail that reaches from every corner of the States. They keep writing to him after they go

long time ago Jimmie was an actor, as was his father before him. Then ecame a prize fighter. From the *Epicurean*, a popular Paris guide, I that in his day he "fought them all at his weight."[2] He still does.

ouple of weeks ago, five cab drivers were boisterous in a small all-night They annoyed a small party that Jimmie knew. He vaulted over a cou- f chairs, aimed in several directions, and three sat down on the floor. others walked off.

a rash moment, I was lured to the local gym where he trains. We put on ounce gloves after he promised to be lenient. I hit the air a dozen times hen, exasperated, I timed a beautiful one from the floor, and let it fly. It k nothing with such power that a tendon of my right hip was strained. took me home in a taxi, and for the rest of that week the injured tendon nassaged regularly by my concierge.

til recently, Jimmie was found at the Falstaff. Now he runs his own bar the street with Frère Eddie, formerly of Ciro's.[3] They attract the lite- hey attract the artists. Soon there will be an additional attraction. And goes. And so it goes. Life is like that.



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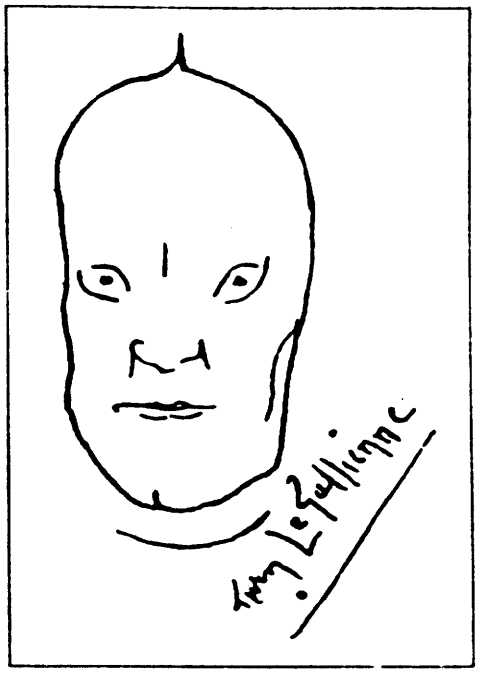

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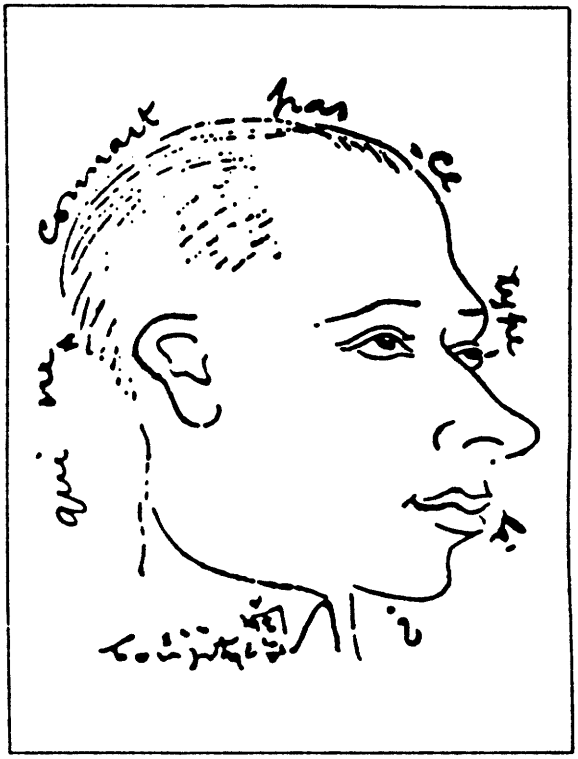

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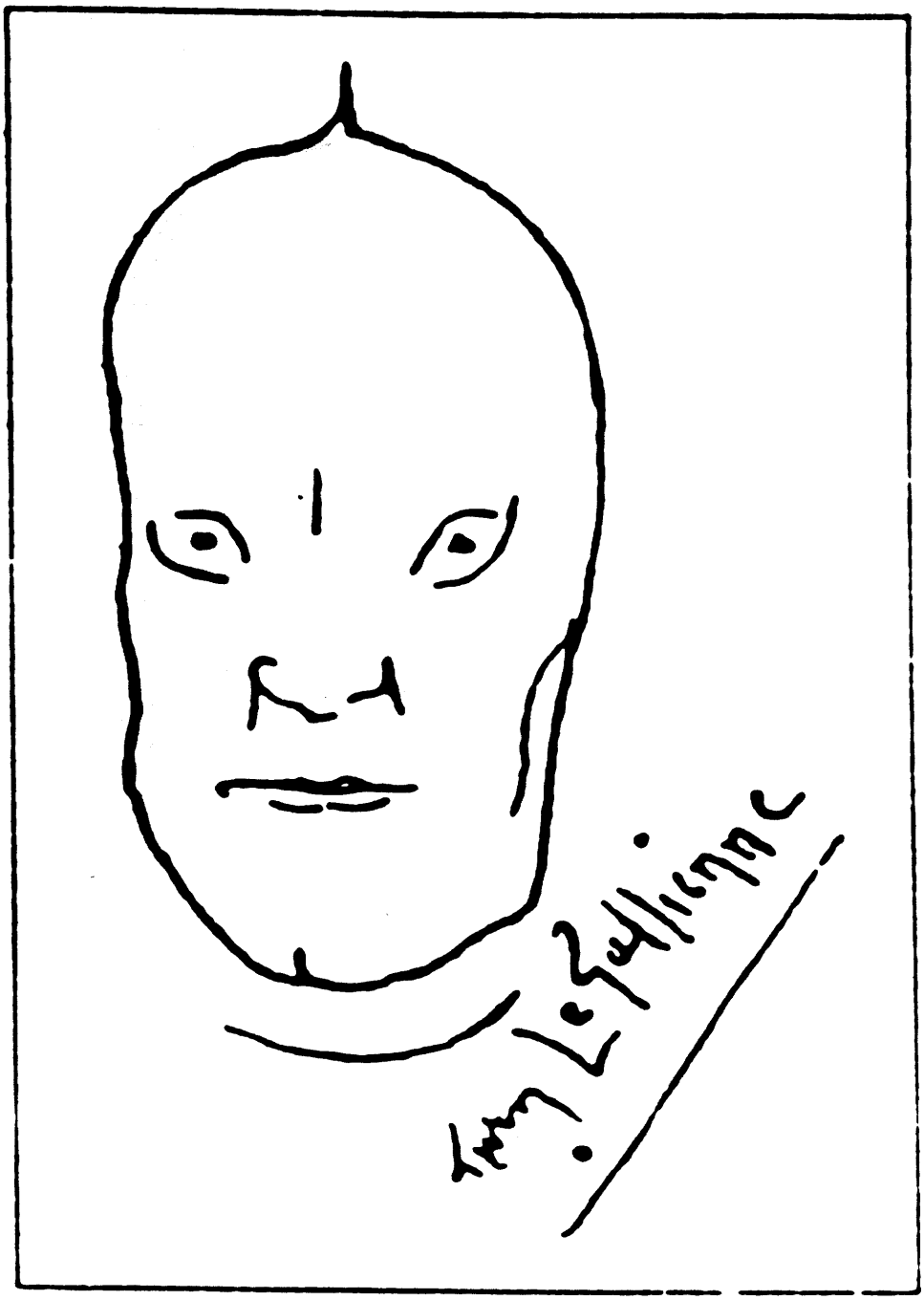

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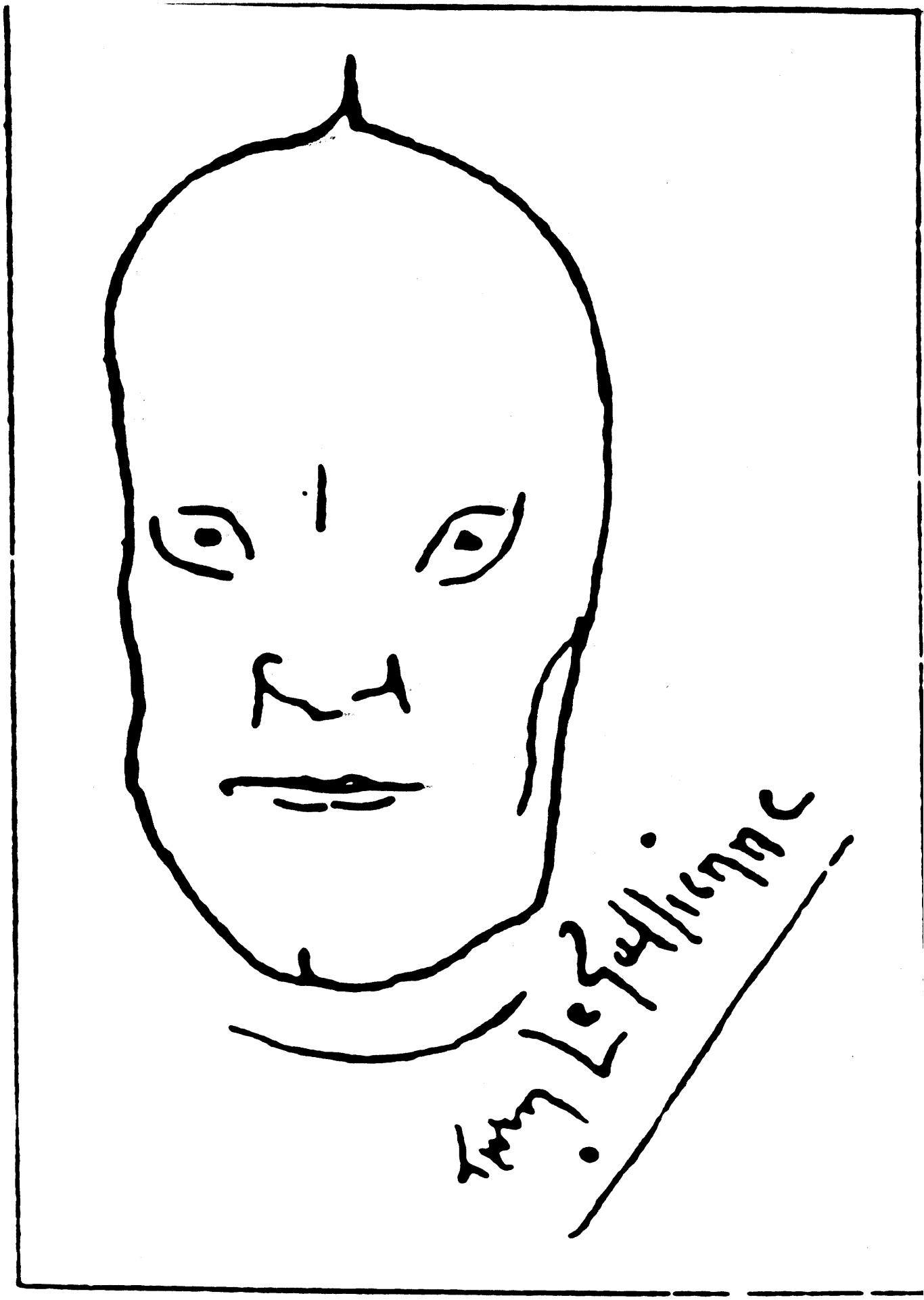

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